Galveston Bagging and Cordage Factory
Winnie Street between 38th and 39th Streets
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas
(now demolished)

HABS No. TX-3319

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HABS
TEX
84-GALV,
23-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GALVESTON BAGGING AND CORDAGE FACTORY HABS No. TX-3319

Location: North side of Winnie Street (Avenue G), between 38th and 39th Streets, Galveston, Galveston County, Texas.

Present Use: Demolished.

Significance: At the time of its erection, 1888, this factory was the only bagging mill in Texas and was possibly the only such factory ever erected in the state. Its purpose was to produce woven jute bagging, a necessity for covering baled cotton. The mill had the capacity to produce 10,000,000 yards of bagging, sufficient to bale the entire Texas cotton crop. In recent times the building was used for cotton bale storage.

The building is architecturally important both for the quality of its design and for its fire-preventive water cistern and sprinkler system. Large 5,000 and 10,000 gallon water tanks located in the three front towers fed a sprinkler system by gravity flow.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1888. On January 1, 1888, the Galveston News reported that the factory was then under construction and by October the building was completed and the machinery was being installed. The factory was operating by December of that year.

2. Architect: Not known.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Galveston Bagging and Cordage Company was chartered April 13, 1877, with $500,000 in capital stock, with B. Adoue, President; J.M. Brown, Vice President; W.F. Ladd, Secretary and Treasurer; Frank DeMerritt, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer. Aboue, Brown, Ladd, J.K. Scup, H. Kempner and T.W. English served as Directors. Oleander Warehouse Company was the last owner of the building.

4. Original plan and construction: It was reported that a three-story factory was originally contemplated with different branches of the work separated thereon. This concept was rejected in favor of single-story plan, thus allowing the entire operation to be supervised one foreman. All of the cording, spinning and weaving necessary to convert the imported jute into cotton bagging was thus conducted

in one large (130' x 300') space.

In the rear of the factory were two large rooms. The east room housed the engine and steam boiler while that on the west (50' x 60') was used as the preparatory or "packer" room where the incoming jute entered. This room was supplied with machinery for opening and preparing the stock (jute) for cording and spinning. The machines, of American manufacture, prepared the jute. First the hard-pressed bale of raw jute was divided, then a series of rollers was used to disintegrate the stock. The material was next coarsely corded or subdivided by two large cylinders, then passed over another cylinder to complete the preparation for sending it into the factory room.

The large factory room was equipped with 100 or more machines, all of English manufacture, for cording, spinning or weaving in converting the jute to bagging. Six lines of shafting for driving these machines traversed the room.

One of the features of this room was the floor construction. Sand fill from the Gulf beaches was hauled in to raise the elevation several feet. This sand was then packed hard, rolled and leveled. Upon this was placed 3" of "asphaltum", rolled solid. Creosoted 4" x 6" sleepers were spaced 14" apart and to these were spiked a sub-flooring of 2" planks. The finished floor of 1 1/4" finely dressed lumber was laid over the sub-flooring.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

By 1888, the agricultural south was beset by the raging controversy over the monopoly established by a few eastern capitalists on the cotton bagging supply. Baled cotton had been for years wrapped in a loosely woven jute material and then encircled with steel bands or ties to maintain the size of the compressed bale. The jute was grown and reduced to fiber in India with British capital and then it was sold to the New England mills by British merchants. By the fall of 1888, the controlled price of bagging had risen to a high of 14 1/2 cents with the prospect of rising even further to 20¢ and 25¢ a yard. As a bale required six yards of material and the Texas crop was nearly 2,000,000 bales, the farmers had cause for alarm.

Various solutions for fighting this trust were proposed, most concerned with finding suitable substitutes for the jute material such as coffee sacks, or even plain burlap. These solutions, however, were overshadowed in Texas by a Galveston venture known as the Galveston Bagging and Cordage Company. By importing the jute directly and making it into bagging, this Company was able to supply enough bagging for all of Texas' cotton crop.

The Company originally purchased three city blocks (Nos. 398, 399 and 400) for a site for a bagging factory and other enterprises auxiliary to the factory such as a cotton cloth factory. The area was at the time described as a "marshy waste, only inhabited by the marsh frog, fiddler crab and crawfish" and was therefore raised from three to four feet making it "one of the highest building sites in town". Only the eastern block of the three was improved to this extent and it was on the site that the bagging factory was erected. Total building cost including the site was reported as $225,000, and the building alone was valued at $100,000 to $125,000. In 1896 the factory was closed.

C. Bibliography

The Galveston Daily News.

January 1, 1888
August 31, 1888
September 2, 1888
September 4, 5 and 8, 1888
October 10, 1888
April 13, 1889
September 1, 1891
July 1, 1896

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The factory covers the entire block and consists of several adjoining brick structures. The major building consists of a perimeter of one-story brick construction with an inner core of raised walls of wooden construction which, being well fenestrated, provided clerestory lighting for the large factory room. Three, three-story brick towers are ranged on the Winnie Street facade, one at each corner and one in the center.

2. Condition of fabric: The brick work is currently in fair condition. The bricks are sound but mortar joints require some attention. The wood construction requires painting to prevent serious deterioration. Roofs are sound and in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: 260' x 300', one story with clerestory and three-story towers.

2. Foundations: The factory was originally erected on a sand fill and the foundations were probably stepped brick grade beams.

3. Wall construction, color, and finish: The brick walls are cemented over up to window-sill height. Between each window, and at the corners of each tower, are engaged brick piers, which create a visual bay effect. The window openings are segmentally arched in brick. The cornices of the perimeter structures are simple horizontal corbels; those of the towers are corbeled arches, characteristic of the Romanesque style.

4. Structural system: The exterior walls are load bearing.

5. Windows: Six-over-six light double-hung wood sash.

6. Roof: Perimeter buildings have flat roofs covered with tar and gravel. The main roof over the factory room is hipped and covered with roll roofing, as are the three tower roofs. The factory room roof is supported by an iron or steel rod truss system.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plan: The factory room itself is one large open span, free-span in the core area but with a wood deck mezzanine around the sides. The towers are planned as one large room on each floor.

Rooms on the east and west adjoin the back wall of the main factory room, the one on the east being originally the steam boiler and engine room, and that on the west being the jute preparatory room. The entire block is completed by large open storage rooms across the north side of the block.

2. Stairways: Circular stairways were placed in each of the end towers to give access to the floors above. The central tower has a half-turn wood stair with landings. The circular stairs are cantilevered from a central circular post support and have a solid wood wainscot.

3. Flooring: The original wood floors throughout have apparently been removed at some point. All floors throughout the factory today are concrete with oyster shell aggregate.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The interior brick walls are exposed. None of the ceilings are finished or boxed in.

5. Mechanical equipment:

   a. Lighting: Original lighting was by natural light through windows and clerestories.

   b. Heating: The original building apparently was unheated.

   c. Fire Protection: A sprinkler system was installed in the original building. The sprinklers were fed by large tanks located in the third floor space of the front towers. The central tower tank had a capacity of 10,000 gallons and those at the corners of 5,000.

D. Site:

The factory occupies the entire city block (260' x 300') numbered 398 which is situated between Winnie and Church Streets and 38th and 39th Streets. The factory faces south onto Winnie Street and is elevated several feet above street level.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Galveston Survey was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Galveston Historical Foundation Inc., and developed under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief

of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). This structure was measured and drawn in the summer of 1967 under the direction of Professor Melvin M. Rotsch, project supervisor (Texas A&M), John C. Garner, Jr., architect (University of Texas), by student architects Michael D. Casey (University of Houston), Larry D. Johnston (Kansas State University), James E. Murphy (Texas A&M), and Gerald R. Rapp (Texas A&M). The historical data was written by John C. Garner, Jr., acting as the Director of the Galveston Architecture Inventory. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Kent R. Newell of HABS staff. The photographs were taken by Allen Stross in the summer of 1967.